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## EDITORIAL NOTES

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At the meeting held in Chicago last fall, under the auspices of the School Board, to discuss ways and means of lessening truancy and delinquency, it was shown that the root causes were, in the main, three: the failure of home influence, need and want in the home, and a failure of the school to supply work which would appeal to a child as worth doing from his own point of view.

A little pamphlet issued in advance of this conference affords most interesting data on this question. It is entitled "An Intensive Study of the Causes of Truancy in Eight Chicago Public Schools, Including a Home Investigation of Eight Hundred Truant Children." The investigation was made by a Hull House worker, three members of the Visiting Nurse Association, and four members of the Compulsory Education Department of the School Board. The investigators hunted down every case of truancy, found its real cause, and relieved the cause as far as possible.

Some children were found who never had been in school, of ages ranging from eight to twelve years. There were others who had managed, through their parents' shrewdness, to evade the compulsory-education law by transferring from a public to a parochial school, and then dropping out. The summing-up of causes of absences in one school tells the story:

Indifferent parents .....	36
Poverty and ignorance of parents.....	21
Illness of child.....	57
Illness in family.....	14
Wilful truancy .....	15
Incorrigibles.....	2
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Total.....	145

In the majority of cases of illness of the child himself it was found that the attention which could be given at school by the nurse was sufficient to enable him to stay. In other cases atten-

tion at home by the nurse reduced the period of his home-staying. Out of 209 children reported ill in one school, during the month of April, 156 were found ill, 13 were not found at all, and 40 were found to be well; while 107 children were cared for in school. These conditions are not unusual, and show plainly that the services of a trained nurse in school districts of this character are of great importance as a means of keeping a certain percentage of children in school.

Where families are too poor to pay for help in the home, and the child's labor is needed there, or when he is the only breadwinner, the recently proposed plan of founding  
**School** scholarships for such cases seems to be the only way  
**Pensions** of keeping the child in school without causing greater hardship at home. This scholarship means that a sum equal to that which the child would otherwise earn is paid into the home during the time of his attendance at school. Here is another of the many ways in which surplus wealth may spend itself to the betterment of social conditions without pauperizing; for money spent in elementary aid to education can never pauperize. The following quotation from the report shows a case of extreme need:

LOUIS B.—This child of nine years, whose parents were dead, lived with his grandmother and grandfather, neither of whom could speak English. The grandfather, besides having lost an arm, was ill and unable to work; the grandmother helped the family by picking up coal and wood on the railroad tracks, and occasionally picking and selling dandelions. Though fairly strong, she was too unskilled to do any sort of profitable work. The boy, the only other member of the family, paid the rent and supported his grandparents by the sale of newspapers. This he did entirely outside of school hours, having been absent only one day during the whole year, and this day he went with his grandmother to interpret for her while she was trying to get a job picking rags on Canal Street. Louis finishes the fourth grade this year. They lived in one rear room, for which they paid two and one-half dollars a month, and which was in fair sanitary condition. It is needless to say that all the members of the family were without sufficient clothing to keep them warm and clean. What clothes the boy had were always in good repair, being generously covered with patches of different colors. He wore nothing under his little coat, not even a shirt. In the more prosperous days the family had owned a white table-cloth, which was cut up into kerchiefs to be worn around the neck of the boy to conceal the absence of the shirt. This is not

cited as a case of school neglect, as the boy was doing well in school and was anxious to keep on, his ambition being to finish the school. It is plain that such a household is on a most precarious footing, and that the boy's education and future usefulness are threatened by the hard work, the insufficient food and clothing, and general scantiness of his life. A school pension for this fatherless child should be obtained. In the meantime an arrangement has been made by which the monthly expenses for rent and coal have been met. The effects of his unchildlike struggle with poverty was shown by the boy's attitude toward the new suit of clothes which was provided for him. It was a gray suit, and he objected to the color, preferring a black one because it would save a new suit in case one of his grandparents should die, an event which he thought quite likely to happen, as they were both very old.

Where children are not sent to school because of the indifference of parents, personal visits, with patient explanation, are needed; where this will not suffice, and parents are still indifferent to the claims of the school, the law provides for prosecution and a fine, which is effective.

Now we come to the last items on our list—"wilful truancy" and "incurability;" and this is where the school itself must face the defections and assume at least a part of the responsibility. It is something of an anomaly to wait until children are sent to the Parental or Reform School before giving them the kind of work that makes school seem worth while to them. Wood-work, metal-work, designing, and all forms of shop-work furnish incentive and motive to the boy in Reform or Parental School. All children need these creative occupations; but it is the boy who is either more self-willed or with less good-will who balks at a course of study in which these occupations are left out. It is he, therefore, who eventually wins what he needs, whether he knows he needs it or not.

The more even-tempered, the less explosive, the better-balanced, obedient children follow the programme offered, and merely grow up through the school with less of initiative and less social training than they would have had if brought into contact with real problems and encouraged to face practical tasks. For it happens that we are so constituted that we find joy in achievements the worth of which we ourselves can measure.

Again to quote from the report :

**JIMMIE H.**—A little Greek boy of eleven years, has reached the second grade only ; both father and mother are educated people. They were married in Paris, where the father was employed by the Greek government. Misfortune brought the family to America. When **One Kind of Backwardness** we first visited them, the father had been ill four months, and the family was in a state of abject poverty, the mother having sold every salable article for herself and her boy. They lived in a basement of five rooms, three of which were dark. For these rooms they paid twelve dollars a month. The boy, Jimmie, is very backward in his school-work, for which, undoubtedly, poverty and insufficient food are partly responsible. He does not give the impression at home of being a stupid child, for he is very fond of playing with a little tool-chest, and will work all day long making things with his saw and hammer. *This ability he has no opportunity of utilizing in school, and there he ranks as a backward child.*

The truant boys frankly owned for the most part a lack of interest in the school curriculum. In several instances they were **Laziness or Love of Work—Which?** found, not running the streets, but at home, and engaged in occupations which suggested the idea that, had they an opportunity for constructive work in school, they would not have turned into truants. One boy spent his time in doing carpentry of all kinds, another milked cows and cleaned the stable and yard, both without any compulsion from their parents. This tends to confirm the impression gained from former experiences with schoolboys that they shirk school for the sake of employments more interesting.

What a testimony this is to the uselessness of offering merely formal studies to children whose strongest bent is toward concrete activities! In our endeavor to make the curriculum so broad that they may be fitted for anything, are we fitting them for nothing? We say, and truly, that the elementary schools should not aim to train a wage-working class simply for artisan work ; but it has been demonstrated again and again that children can get a general culture and instruction in the formal knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic, by and with work on concrete problems. These problems are found in construction work of all sorts ; and the virtue that is in them cannot be replaced by dealing with motiveless abstractions.

A good story comes from the principal of the Jewish Manual Training School. Mr. Milliken was sitting in his office one day, when an officer came in with a boy who had been sent there by the judge of the Juvenile Court. The boy had been an incorrigible truant, was in his fourteenth year, and would neither stay in school nor learn anything while there. The judge had decided to try the effectiveness of a large proportion of manual work. Doubtless he would have been surprised at the mode of initiation which followed:

**Indirect  
Methods**

"Well, so you don't like to go to school?"

"Nope."

"What's the matter with school?"

"Nothin' in it."

"Well, do you think you'll like this school?"

"Nope."

"Don't want to try it, eh?"

"Don't think I'll like it."

"What do you like to do?"

"Nothin'."

"Ever try to make anything?"

"Nope, never tried that."

"Well, my boy, you got here this morning on time, at least, and that's something. Now I'll tell you what I'll do. You need not do anything here if you don't want to. Just come here with me, and I'll show you a nice comfortable place where you can watch other people work. You'll like that, perhaps."

"Well you just bet I do—nothing better!"

So the head of the school picked up an easy office chair, carried it to the wood-working shop, and deposited it in a sunny corner. Here the boy was ensconced, with the injunction to make himself comfortable as long as he liked. The next day the principal came around to where he sat.

"Say, this is swell."

"You like that, do you?"

"Like it! Why, it's the softest thing I ever struck."

After having tasted the sweets of ease for three days, the boy was seized with a desire to make something that was wanted at home. This wish was indulged, and very soon it became necessary to do a little measuring. Measuring meant some arithmetical procedure, which came very toilsomely, but was achieved

finally with the assistance of the teacher of the arithmetic class. His immediate problem solved, the boy decided to go on in the arithmetic class. Another piece of work was begun in the shop, and in the course of this a book of designs and descriptions was offered to help him to make a choice of pattern. Obstacle no. two: he could not read well enough to find out what he wanted. His kind friend, the principal, again solicited a place for him in a reading-class. Again the boy decided to stay on in it after he was in possession of the particular printed facts that his shop-work called for. According to the chronicler of these events, it took the boy about three weeks to take upon himself a full scholastic curriculum in addition to his shop-work. All of which he kept up for the year of his stay, which ended in his going to work.

These revelations of the relation between truancy and a lack of constructive occupation have resulted in an experiment. This experiment is the establishment of industrial rooms for boys of the intermediate grades in some of the public schools. It is in these middle grades that the desire to roam and explore seems to conquer the boy's supposed thirst for knowledge. These rooms are not in any sense branches of a reform school, but are intended to offer such a combination of manual work and formal instruction as will make the bond stronger between the restive boy and the school. The success of this experiment will depend, not only on the inherent charm of productive work, but also on the sagacity and tact of the teachers assigned to this charge.

The natural docility of girls, as compared with that of boys, keeps them from committing the same rebellious acts, and hence the powers that be are not forced to give them the same advantages—a condition which has gained for boys always much that would otherwise have never been thought of for them, and is now not thought of for the girls, because not demanded. But it is well to state right here that what is needed by the boys is quite as imperatively needed for the girls, and would lead to the desired result of making better-equipped and less frivolous women.

B. P.